The veterinarian is expected to be the animal welfare professional par excellence, having the full range of knowledge and skills required to assess animal welfare, identify problems and make recommendations for improvements. Consequently a veterinarian should be well educated in all aspects of both animal welfare and ethics. This study examined how and to what extent animal welfare is being taught during veterinary education in EU veterinary schools and faculties. Evaluation reports from 43 veterinary schools in 24 countries were analyzed. Overall, the study illustrates that the way animal welfare is taught differs greatly from school to school.

Animal Welfare Teaching in European Veterinary Faculties
Nancy De Brune (Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) with the support of European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE))

In some of the evaluated schools, animal welfare teaching is firmly embedded throughout the whole curriculum. In other schools, however, animal welfare is almost exclusively presented in terms of legislation rather than from an applied perspective. It is recommended that animal welfare is taught from an applied perspective (e.g. practical aspects of welfare on farms, during transport, or at slaughter) instead of addressing only the legislative aspects. Part of the teaching should be done in an interactive way promoting critical analysis of situations from different perspectives.

01 Introduction

The promotion and protection of animal welfare is one of the core competences of a well-educated veterinarian. The veterinarian profession in particular, is an excellent position to assess animal welfare, to identify causes of sub-optimal welfare and to make recommendations for its correction. To do so, veterinarians need to be taught during their undergraduate training the full range of knowledge, critical thinking and skills to assess animal welfare (OIE, the World Organization for Animal Health, urged all Veterinary and Agricultural Science Faculties to include the teaching of animal welfare in their curriculum (OIE ref. SANCO/23719/2004). This study examined to what extent and how animal welfare is taught during undergraduate veterinary education in European veterinary faculties.

In about 100 establishments in Europe, of which 73 are in the European Union, it takes 5-4 years study to become a veterinary surgeon. Within the EU, mutual recognition of veterinary diplomas has been established by law. This means that EU citizens, who have obtained their veterinary degree and the right to practice in their country of residence, may also practice in other Member States without the need for further examinations. Directive 2006/79/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications provides a list of the subjects - amongst which are animal welfare and ethics - that must be taught within the veterinary curriculum to make the veterinary qualification eligible for “automatic” recognition. In order to verify that veterinary teaching establishments satisfy the necessary criteria (as defined by the above mentioned Directive), an evaluation system has been in operation since 1998. For some years now, it has been administered jointly by the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) and the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) (http://www.eaeve.org, http://www.fve.org).

02 Methodology

Most of the veterinary faculties in the European Union and several non-EU countries have been evaluated at least once under the evaluation system. Each evaluation team prepares a detailed report which looks into all the relevant aspects of undergraduate teaching. Evaluation Reports from 43 faculties were examined in order to analyse the relevance given to animal welfare in the objectives/mission statement of the establishment and the presence of animal welfare teaching in the curriculum (number of hours contributed).

Reviewing Animal Welfare Teaching in the 43 faculties examined, the following conclusions can be reached:

- Many schools have increased their efforts in Animal Welfare teaching in recent years;
- Animal Welfare teaching is firmly embedded throughout the whole undergraduate study in some EU veterinary faculties (mentioned in core objectives, special Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee, specific department(s) and dedicated teaching staff);
- However, in a substantial number of other European veterinary faculties, animal welfare teaching is not an integral part of the curriculum. Animal Welfare teaching science does not feature prominently. Often it is presented principally in terms of legislative aspects given in theoretical manner and neither from an applied perspective (e.g. practical aspects of welfare on farms, during transport, or at slaughter) nor in an integrated way (linking animal health, welfare and public health);
- It is a small number of European schools, animal welfare is addressed in an inadequate and/or fragmented manner in teaching (number of hours and/or in quality of education);
- In addition, in a small number of teaching establishments, housing, husbandry and animal welfare control practices at the faculty and clinics associated with the faculty need to be improved.

It should be noted that comparing evaluation reports - which give a snapshot view - can be quite difficult. Only a limited number of parameters on animal welfare are systematically recorded in every veterinary faculty, while other issues are only recorded when one of the evaluators has a special interest in animal welfare teaching.

03 Results

Revising Animal Welfare Teaching in the 43 faculties examined, the following conclusions can be reached:

- Attention paid to animal welfare teaching differs greatly between schools e.g. number of hours specifically dedicated to it in the curriculum varies from zero up to 56 hours (average 22);
- Teaching establishments should include a reference to animal health and welfare in their core objectives and mission statement.
- Animal welfare and the interrelation between animal health, animal welfare and public health - should be taught in an integrated manner throughout the whole curriculum (not only in the pre-clinical course);
- Animal welfare teaching should not only address the legislative aspects but be approached from an applied perspective (e.g. practical aspects of welfare on farms, during transport, or at slaughter). Part of the teaching should be done in an interactive way promoting critical analysis of situations from different perspectives;

04 Recommendations

- Teaching establishments should include a reference to animal health and welfare in their core objectives and mission statement;
- The faculty and clinics associated with the faculty should have a faculty code of practice, exhibiting best practice in regard to animal welfare in order to demonstrate these concepts to students;
- A specific evaluation of the animal welfare and ethics teaching faculty including the suggestion of recommendations for improvement could be beneficial.

Vet of European veterinary schools with evaluation status (approved, not approved or not visited) and date of last evaluation:

1. Albania
A. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
1. Italy
A. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
2. Austria
A. Veterinary University of Vienna
3. Belgium
A. Université Libre de Bruxelles
4. Bulgaria
A. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
University of Medicine and Health Sciences
5. Croatia
A. Faculty of Veterinary Science
University of Zagreb
6. Croatia
A. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
University of Zagreb
7. Cyprus
A. University of Cyprus - Veterinary Medicine
8. Czech Republic
A. Veterinary Medicine and Pharmaceutical Faculty
University of Veterinary Medicine, Brno
9. Denmark
A. Danish Veterinary and Animal Science University
10. Estonia
A. Veterinary and Agricultural University
11. Finland
A. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
University of Helsinki Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
12. France
A. Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Sciences
Université de Liège Faculté de Médecine Vétérinaire
13. Germany
A. Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover
Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover (2008)
14. Greece
A. University of Athens - School of Veterinary Medicine
15. Greece
A. Aristotle University - Thessaloniki
16. Greece
A. University of Thessaly
17. Hungary
A. Veterinary University of Szeged
Hungarian University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology
18. Latvia
A. University of Veterinary Medicine
University of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science
19. Lithuania
A. University of Veterinary Medicine
University of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science
20. Luxembourg
A. Veterinary Medicine
University of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science
21. Malta
A. University of Malta - School of Veterinary Medicine
22. Norway
A. Norwegian School of Veterinary Science
University of Trondheim - Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
23. Poland
A. Warsaw University of Life Sciences - University of Life Sciences
24. Portugal
A. Federal University of Veterinary Medicine
25. Romania
A. University of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science
26. Russia
A. Siberian Federal University - Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
27. Slovenia
A. University of Ljubljana - School of Veterinary Medicine
28. Spain
A. University of Barcelona - Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
University of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science
29. Sweden
A. University of Uppsala - Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
30. Switzerland
A. University of Berne - Faculté des Sciences Vétérinaires
31. Turkey
A. Universidad de Córdoba Facultad de Medicina Veterinaria
32. Ukraine
A. Taras Shevchenko National University of Veterinary Medicine and Bioengineering
33. United Kingdom
A. University of Liverpool - School of Veterinary Medicine
University of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science